



(U) InSIDer's View of History: Desert One - The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission

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(TS//SI) I remember the night quite distinctly. It's one of those occasions that will be indelibly marked in your memory, and in some ways defines your perception of world events. It was April 24, 1980 and I was working the swing shift in the old Runway Operations Center (ROC), located on the 2nd floor of the old Ops building next to the old NSOC. Starting about three months prior to that night, we would occasionally move off our assigned targets (the former Soviet Union) and copy Iranian troposcatter emitters. We called them "ducks" because they had a distinctive tone in the maintenance channel, which sounded exactly like a quacking duck.

(TS//SI) We stayed on the emitters even though they weren't loaded, i.e., they had absolutely no traffic on them. We did that on three different nights during the previous three months, but we didn't know why. Later we found out that the hostage rescue team had made 3 penetrations into Iranian airspace in preparation for the attempted rescue.

(TS//SI) That night I remember coming in about 1500. I was told by the outgoing watch officer that the deputy division chief was coming down to brief us about an ongoing mission. At about 1600 [REDACTED] Deputy Chief A14, arrived in the ROC and called the outgoing watch officer, [REDACTED] and me over to the side of the room. [REDACTED] was a tall man, and he leaned over to speak softly to us so that no one else could hear. "The Director (Vice Admiral Bobby Inman) holds everyone who receives this briefing personally responsible for the lives of the hostages and the rescue team. Operation Ricebowl is underway." We just stared at him with a stunned look on our faces. He must have sensed that we didn't know what he was talking about, because just as he started to turn around to leave he quickly turned back. "The Iranian Air Defense troposcatters that you've been copying for months - it was in preparation for a rescue mission of the hostages in Iran. It's a go."

(TS//SI) The entire night we looked for indications that the Iranian Air Defense system had detected the rescue team as they entered Iranian airspace and landed at the Desert One site. (We knew the parameters of the Iranian Air Defense system because it was U.S. equipment and installed by U.S. contractors while the Shah of Iran was still in power. We knew exactly where the gaps in coverage were and we exploited it during the rescue attempt.) We heard absolutely nothing the entire night, and I went home at midnight without knowing anything about the results of the mission.

(U) The next morning I got up about 0900 and went downstairs for breakfast. The kids were already at school and my wife started the coffee and turned on the TV as I sat down at the table. There was a special newscast on and some reporter at the Pentagon was talking about a developing story. My wife came out of the kitchen as the



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8. [InSIDer's View of History : Desert One - The Iranian Hostage Rescue Mission](#)
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reporter was relaying the news about the disaster at the Desert One landing site. I watched in horror as they showed pictures of the charred remains of the aircraft. Without thinking I just blurted out, "Oh my God. They didn't make it!" My wife looked at me and said, "You knew?" I hung my head down and remembered the words from the night before: "The Director holds everyone who receives this briefing personally responsible for the lives of the hostages and the rescue team. Operation Ricebowl is underway."

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